

## BOX 7.1.

**Professional websites as conversation starters.**

Thomas J. Tobin  
Higher education consultant, author, and speaker

Find Tom online:

Professional website: <http://thomasjtobin.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ThomasJTobin>

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/thomas.j.tobin](http://www.facebook.com/thomas.j.tobin)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/drtomtobin/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/drtomtobin/)

When Tom created his first professional website in the mid-1990s, it served as a way to introduce himself to the world of academia when he was still a graduate student. He hand-coded the site in HTML and created a database to share some of what he was learning in his PhD studies in English literature. When people started contacting him to learn more about his work, he knew he was onto something. Fast-forward more than 20 years and several career shifts later, and Tom is still using the web to connect with colleagues, build relationships, and grow his network.

Rather than collect followers, Tom is focused on using his online presence, primarily on Twitter and LinkedIn, to facilitate conversations, create professional collaborations, and share resources. He prefers not to retweet and repost much content, but rather to add value through his own lens by recommending others' work that he admires and through providing original content like his comic book on copyright. Tom uses online platforms to build quality in-person relationships that he nurtures when he connects with colleagues at conferences and visits campuses for speaking and consulting.

Tom employs social media in order to continue connections and interactions in his "real" life, so that his online presence is a true reflection of who he is as a person. That means that he works hard to nurture permeable borders between his personal and professional online spaces. He sees online tools as a way to create, join, and nurture conversations that can lead to deep and meaningful relationships with colleagues.

*You Are Selling a Service*

If you are creating a professional website to promote yourself as a speaker, consultant, or coach, or if you are providing some other kind of professional service, you will want to place information about that service, your rates, and a biographical statement in a prominent place. When selling a service, people need to know why they would hire you over someone else, so offering examples of your services and testimonials